

NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



KEVIN BOHN NAMED CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

Kevin Bohn, Day County Veterans Service Officer, was named Webster Area Chamber of Commerce 2018 Citizen of the Year.

Chamber President Renae Worrell described Bohn as a man who goes above and beyond his community.

Bohn was one of nine nominees for this annual award.

Besides his work as a VSO, Bohn also commits time to his community by announcing baseball games and swim meets, refereeing basketball games, or volunteering at Kiwanis, Key Club, and WABA activities and events.

In his acceptance speech Bohn said, "Taking care of veterans in this community is something I take very seriously."

SDDVA extends our sincere thanks to CVSO Bohn for his unending commitment to veterans and his service to his community and to the state. Kevin Bohn and Marcia Solberg have done an outstanding job of taking care of veterans and providing great programs to honor them for their service.



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(Photo courtesy of the Webster Reporter and Farmer.)

MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY WHITLOCK

Launching in April of 2019, the Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses program (VET TEC), piloted by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, will help veterans in advancing their IT careers.

This innovative new pilot program pairs eligible veterans with market-leading training providers offering high-tech training and skills development sought by employers. Veterans will have their classes and training paid for by the VA and will receive a monthly housing stipend during their training.

VET TEC is unique because the computer skills training programs take just months or even weeks to complete. Acquiring essential skills in such a short amount of time gives veterans the opportunity to advance their career sooner rather than later.

The five high-demand training areas include computer software, information science, media application, computer programming and data processing.

Veterans will have to apply to the VA to determine eligibility for VET TEC, and then to a VA-approved Training Provider. Once accepted into the program, veterans will train in one of the five areas of high-tech training. After completing the program, veterans will have new skills that will help them secure meaningful employment in the modern workforce.

Participation in the VET TEC program will not count against GI Bill entitlement. With just one day of unexpired entitlement left, veterans can apply to participate in VET TEC.

A VA Fact Sheet was shared with all county and tribal veterans service officers earlier this week to assist with questions they may receive. Some things to remember:

- The VET TEC Veteran application is not available at this time. When it is released it will be deployed on the [GI Bill website](#).
- Training Providers can find information about the VET TEC Program at the following links:

[General VET TEC Information](#)

[VET TEC Training Provider Specific Information](#)

[VET TEC Veteran Student Information](#)

As always, for more information on education benefits, the apprenticeship program and on-the-job training program, we encourage you to call Shane Olivier and Ryan Fowler.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs

PENNINGTON COUNTY HONORS KOREAN WAR VETERAN

Last week, Pennington County had the distinct honor to pay tribute to one of our Korean War Veterans.

SDDVA Field Officer Will Huffmon presented Korean War Veteran Merle Mettler with the Ambassador For Peace Medal at the Pennington County Veteran Service Office.

In Dec 1952 Merle was drafted from his family's farm near Eureka and into the US Army. He joined Battery C, 90th Field Artillery Battalion in Korea and spent four months in combat before the ceasefire took effect.

After his discharge in 1954, Merle moved back to South Dakota and settled in Rapid City where he worked as a truck driver for Nash Finch Company, retiring in 1997.



Will Huffmon, SDDVA West River Field Officer presents the Ambassador For Peace Medal to Korean War Veteran Merle Mettler.

STATE VETERANS HOME HONORED FOR 130 YEARS

Last week the Senate commemorated the 130th anniversary of the establishment of the South Dakota State Veterans Home and honored those who have taken care of our heroes.

For 130 years the mission has always been to honor and serve our veterans. The Michael J Fitzmaurice Veterans Home today offers many services and amenities to our residents, including: physician services, occupational therapy, speech therapy, physical therapy, pharmacy, pastoral services, library, beauty/barbershop, transportation services and bistro. We are caring for our heroes and love every minute of it!

Most recently, the Home received the Safety Facility Award from the Big Senior Crime Stoppers program, LEED Silver certification, national certification in Music and Merry program and partnered with the South Dakota Arts Council on the Veterans Art Initiative.

It is an honor and privilege to provide high-quality care to our nation's heroes each and every day. We strive to deliver the same level of integrity and commitment that our veterans experienced and demonstrated while in service.

VA'S 'BETTER STARTS TODAY' CAMPAIGN CHALLENGES VETERANS TO DITCH SMOKELESS TOBACCO

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it will mark the annual [Great American Spit Out](#) on Feb. 21, calling attention to the dangers of using smokeless tobacco, with its "Better Starts Today" campaign.

The VA campaign encourages veterans who use tobacco products, including smokeless tobacco, to stop dipping or chewing for at least one day, and take advantage of innovative VA tools to help them succeed, with the hope that they may choose to quit permanently.

"Quitting smokeless tobacco can be challenging, but with the VA's help it can be much easier," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "That's why we are telling veterans about several proven strategies and tools that can help them give up smokeless tobacco for good."

Resources to help veterans quit smokeless tobacco include:

- **Quit VET**, a toll-free national Quitline, at 855-QUIT-VET (855-784-8838) for veterans to speak with a tobacco cessation counselor, make a quit plan and receive ongoing counseling after their quit date. Quitline counselors are available from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. (EST) Monday through Friday.
- **SmokefreeVET**, a text message program (text VET to 47848) offering veterans three to five support texts a day with advice and encouragement to help them while they stop using tobacco. Veterans can also text the keywords URGE, STRESS and DIPPED anytime to receive an immediate tip for coping with an urge to use, a slip or stress.

A 2015 Centers for Disease Control survey estimated 29.2 percent of American Veterans use at least one tobacco product, with 5.2 percent using smokeless tobacco. Smokeless tobacco is associated with mouth and esophageal cancer, heart disease, stroke, tooth decay and receding gums.

The VA providers offer individual counseling, group classes, phone and telehealth clinics and FDA-approved medications.

For more information and resources about tobacco cessation and how families and friends of veterans can help, visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco.



VA PUBLISHES INTERIM FINAL RULE ON CASH-OUT HOME LOANS TO FURTHER PROTECT VETERANS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it has published an interim [final rule](#) relating to VA-guaranteed cash-out refinance loans to further protect veteran home-loan borrowers from predatory lending practices.

This rule implements certain provisions of the Economic Growth, Regulatory Relief, and Consumer Protection Act, and provides new regulatory safeguards relating to VA-guaranteed cash-out refinance loans. Such loans generally allow borrowers to convert home equity into cash.

In many cases, the principal balance of the new refinance loan is larger than the payoff amount of the loan being refinanced. This means the veteran will generally receive some amount of cash at closing. The cash can then be used at the veteran's discretion to pay off debt, fund education, make home improvements and more.

The VA's cash-out home-loan program can also be used to refinance a non-VA loan into a VA-guaranteed loan. Certain borrowers can use VA-guaranteed cash-out refinance loans to borrow up to 100 percent of the value of their home.

"The VA has taken significant steps to make the home-loan benefit the most competitive loan program available to veterans," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "We want to ensure the home-loan program remains strong, attractive and accessible to all who are eligible, while creating a framework for lender accountability to veterans and taxpayers."

The rule will help protect veterans from predatory refinance practices and minimize risk to taxpayers and the secondary mortgage market. For example, the rule specifically requires that lenders disclose clearly, both at the time of application and again at closing, a plain comparison of the existing loan's cost with that of the new loan. These disclosures will help veterans understand the impact of the refinance loan. This is in line with the VA's current policy on [Interest Rate Reduction Refinance Loans](#).

Further, the rule imposes loan seasoning and "net tangible benefit" standards. To meet the seasoning requirement, at least 210 days must pass and six monthly payments must be made prior to refinancing an existing loan. The cash-out refinance loan must also provide the veteran with at least one of eight "net tangible benefits" defined by the VA in the rule.

Since 1944, VA has guaranteed over 23 million home loans worth more than \$2 trillion. Veterans with questions about the VA Home Loan Program should call 877-827-3702. For more information on the VA Home Loan program, visit <https://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/>.

ARNOLD JOINS SDDVA TEAM

Guy Arnold joins the SDDVA Team and will serve as a special projects coordinator for SDDVA with his main focus on the State Veterans Home at this time. His first two projects will be to focus on resident and staff recruitment. The goal is to have a wait list of veterans wanting to move into our State Home.

In addition, Guy will work to recruit and retain staff at the Home. He will be working with colleges, universities and tech schools to secure students willing to work with our heroes. The State Veterans Home, like most medical facilities, has been challenged with staffing issues for numerous years.

Guy is a Kansas native, but has called South Dakota home since 1997.

Guy joined the South Dakota National Guard in 2006 at the ripe young age of 39!!!! His MOS is 68W20 (Combat Medic – SGT). He was deployed in 2009-2010 to Kuwait (Camp Patriot – Kuwait Naval Base).

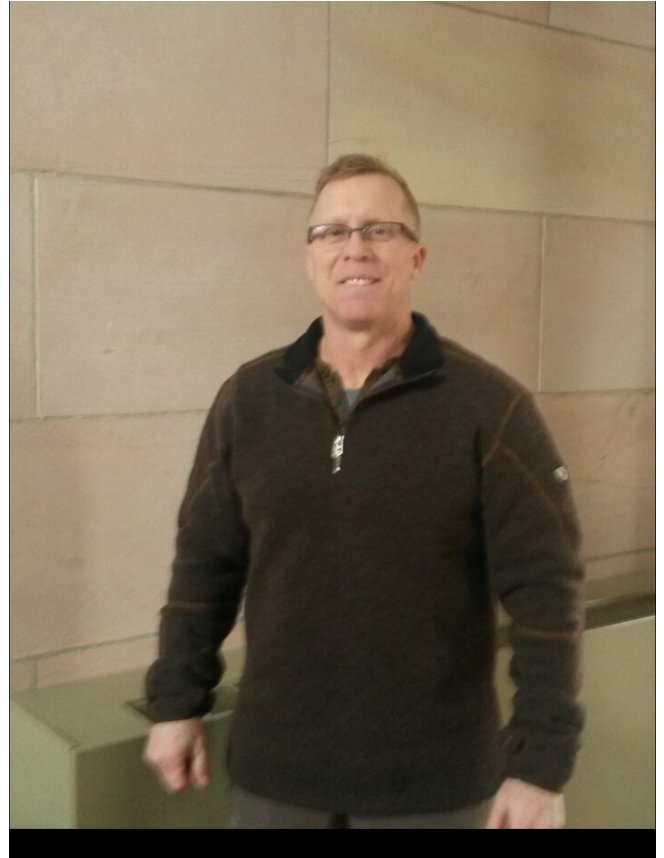
Guy served as the NE Area Coordinator for South Dakota National Guard Military Funeral Honors for two and a half years and served as the NE Area Recruiting and Retention Assistant with the South Dakota National Guard for two and a half years.

Guy is scheduled to deploy to Poland this September with Alpha Battery, 1-147th Field Artillery out of Aberdeen.

His hobbies include working out and he loves CrossFit, mountain biking, golfing, and working with his one-year old German Sheppard pup!

Collectively, Guy and his wife Sheri have nine children.

Please join SDDVA in welcoming Guy to our team.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb 21—Drop In Legal Services—American Legion Post 17 (1412 9th Ave SW—Watertown 9:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)
 Feb 22—Drop in Legal Services—DAV (1519 W. 51st Street)—Sioux Falls 9:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)
 Feb 26—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Hot Springs Building 12—Room A002—10:00 am—12:00 pm (MT)
 Mar 3—NSIC/Sanford Basketball Championship Military Appreciation Day—Sanford Pentagon—Sioux Falls
 Mar 3-7—VFW Legislative Conference—Washington, DC
 Mar 6—VABHHCS Art Show—Building 145—Classroom 108—Ft. Meade—1:00 pm to 4:00 pm (MT)
 Mar 8—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273 (420 Main Street—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
 Mar 12—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Ft Meade—Building 145—Room 239—1:00 pm—3:00 pm (MT)
 Mar 13—VABHHCS Art Show—Hot Springs Domiciliary Auditorium—1:00 to 4:00 pm (MT)
 Mar 20—South Dakota Veterans Council meeting—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
 Mar 26—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Hot Springs Building 12—Room A002—10:00 am—12:00 pm (MT)
 Apr 6—State MOPH Convention—Rapid City DAV (101 E. Madison Street) - 1:00 pm (MT)
 May 7—SDDVA Mini Conference—TREA (1981 Centre Street)—Rapid City—10:00 am—3:00 pm (MT)
 May 8—SDDVA Mini Conference—Post 8 American Legion (520 S. Pierre Street)—Pierre—10:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)
 May 9—SDDVA Mini Conference—VFW (3601 S. Minnesota Avenue)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)
 May 14—Bill Casper's Annual WW II Luncheon—TREA—Rapid City
 May 17—Veterans Honor Concert—State Veterans Home—Hot Springs—2:00 pm (MT)
 May 17-19—DAV Convention—Hilton Garden Inn (5300 S. Grand Circle) —Sioux Falls
 May 27—MJFSVH Memorial Day Car Show—Hot Springs—2:00 pm (MT)
 Jun 13-16—VFW State Convention—Dakota State University—Madison
 July 20-24—National VFW Convention—Orlando, FL
 Aug 26-29—SDDVA Benefit School



Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer

South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <http://vetaffairs.sd.gov>

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